

[There's No Place Like Home]

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31 B SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Date of First Writing December 8, 1938

Name of Person Interviewed Mamie Collins (white)

Fictitious Name Maria Britton

Street Address Rains, R.F.D.

Place Marion County

Occupation Housemistress

Name of Writer Annie Ruth Davis

Almost at the same moment that I went up on the porch, Maria Britton came running across the field in great haste, jumping cornstalks and dodging briars which hindered her. Under one arm she lugged a bushel basket of fresh green peas. She was dressed for the field - a torn brown gingham apron over a checked gingham dress. A red sweater, with elbows out and wrist bands frassled, blended with a red knitted cap. Her shoulders were slightly stooped from years of toil. From a tight knot of long, light brown hair, a few stray

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hairs dangled over her forehead, neck and face, sallow and roughened from 2 exposure and work. But her weathered face was lightened by bright gray eyes, [gleamingly?] alive with interest in her surroundings.

“Oh, I'm so tired and nervous I don't know what to do, I've got this neuritis so bad. You mustn't think hard the way you've caught me appearing this time. Just pulled on these old stockings and tore-up apron to go over yonder and help Miss Richardson pick her a mess of peas. Miss Richardson, she's my good neighbor. We helps one another out oftentimes, 'cause it's just come to the place Niggers is getting so no-count that white people can't depend on none of them no more. Being I was done over there a-laboring, I says to myself, I might as well store in a mess for me and Bud, too. Bud, he's my brother, and just we two lives here by ourselves since my sister, Henriett, died last year.

“Bud was a-saying, setting right on them doorsteps last evening, cold weather ain't far off hitting us now, and I've sho' got to be getting plenty of fodder stacked to feed my cow on this winter. Honey, you know, if you can have your milk and a few chickens, you've got something, she's my little pet cow, too. She's been mighty pretty, but she's fell off some now. That calf in the stall over there is just five months old, and I know it's fine as you've ever seen. Lord knows, it takes many a hundred stops to see after them, and I know I do lots more than I'm able with this neuritis and me fifty-seven year old, but then it's mighty nice. The milk's all and all in the home, I say. Cose, my cow, she don't give so much milk, but she's small and done better than I expected being a yearling. I bought that cow when it wan't nothing but hip high.

“Come over here and set down, honey, and I'll sho' spare you a minute to talk anyhow, I'm so glad to see you. Lord knows, I wish you could've come 3 while Henriett was living. Me and her was talking of you and them club meetings up to Rains just before she got hurt. Honey, I done finished my sunflower quilt. Remember me to show it to you when you get ready to go.

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"Henriett, poor creature, she started up the road to Rains one day last November and made a misstep that sprawled her right out on the pavement. I tell you, child, highways is the worse curse the Lord ever sent on us good people. It's been a puzzle tome how long she did live, for every rib she didn't break, she fractured. We carried he to Dukes, but couldn't no doctor do nothing for her on this earth. Said the cancer had done set in and was eating clean through her. We took her off the Monday before Thanksgiving and she lived all of sixteen days in that condition. Lord knows, when Henriett come home a corpse, I like to went crazy, 'cause I never had stayed a whole week by myself before in all my born days. Seems like if I'm busy, it takes things off my mind; but if I drops down to rest, you knows I'm lonesome.

"Oh, my shoulder does hurt me so bad. No, I ain't never been one to set still long to a time, and since this neuritis is settled in this [hore?] plump spot on my hip, I just has to get up and twist now and then. It must be a ailment from my teeth 'cause I've got seven loose now, so loose till they're near 'bout dangling. And look here, my fingers is swell so till I can't hardly sew myself a garment. Honey, it hurts me to tell anybody howdy. Hurts me to squeeze a dishrag dry.

"The good Lord knows me and Bud's been up against it this last year. Cose our business is our business, but we've got [Henriett's?] burial expenses laying heavy on us, and we ain't neither one had [ne'ar?] a rag of clothes cut our last year's crop yet. We didn't get but \$150.00 out this whole place last year and Lord knows, that's just what [Henriett's?] sickness cost us. We would've 4 done pulled out this hole if we could just got enough tobacco to plant, but it's plum scandalous how that agent up yonder's treated us. He ain't allowed us but a little over a acre of tobacco on all this place and that's every bit the money crop we had coming to us last year. Cose Bud, he made a bunker crop at that. Bud said he hauled 2,000 pounds of tobacco himself to that warehouse in Mullins, but he never got nothing for 300 pounds of it. They just told him up to Mullins that his tobacco figured

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that much more poundage than his government card said was coming to him. Lord knows, it never brought but \$300.00 and half that went to the sharecropper.

“Being me and Bud can't keep a mule an this place with no money crop much, we have to sharecrop our land with another fellow. We furnishes the land, the seed, and the fertilizer, and the other man, he does the work and supplies the team. Goes when the work gets in a jam, me and Bud helps all we can. We usually makes a little peas and potatoes along with some corn, but time we part half with that other fellow, we don't make enough to last no time. We've got to try and borrow enough on our next year's crop to pull through somehow. Bud said it was his honest intention to plant more corn than he did this year, but the man just didn't have the team to carry it. Just made forty bushels of corn and that ain't half enough. And we sho' meant to get [more?] than just them two rows of peas planted over there in the garden, but we couldn't get no work done hardly with all this W.P.A. going on. We've been making from one to two banks of potatoes a year; now, we don't have none. It's been so dry, we got our potatoes out late this year. Then the people got so busy in the tobacco, we couldn't get them worked like they ought to been. No, we ain't eat ne'er a potato this year, but what Miss Richardson drops in my apron 5 now and then. We hoping to get four acres of tobacco to put out next year so as we can fix our house. The good Lord knows we needs it if anybody does with half the porch a-tumbling down on us. Poor people needs tobacco more than rich ones, but the rich folks is the ones that's getting it. Didn't plant no cotton this year neither, but them what did, the boll weevil hit it pretty heavy. Bud was a-saying last evening, we mustn't let another year pass without us getting all the money crop we can get hold of.

“But, Lord knows, I do love this old place 'cause it was my great-grandpa's place, the old man John J. Britton. I'll tell you, don't care if that was my great-grandpa, he was a knocker. His father came to this country way back yonder, the Lord only knows how far back, and settled over to Florence County. When he died, he left great-grandpa one fine plantation, and soon after he got that, he married Elizabeth E. Woodberry. Then long about 1830, great-grandpa sold out all he owned over there and moved cross here to Marion County

to this same place. I don't know what prompted him to take up and move, but I reckon he saw a better outlook over this way and some said he thought it would be more healthy. He bought 12,000 acres over here and never paid but fifteen cents a acre for it. Well, he had two boys and one girl by that first wife, John B., Richard, and Mary. Then after she died, he married a Fladger, and they had four children. But [I?] just can't recall none but Sofia of them last ones. The Fladger woman died with typhoid fever and great-grandpa married a Watson. She was his last wife and didn't have no children. All them children married, but Lord knows, I can't keep up with all that bunch. All I know, John B. married Catherine McKay and them was my grandparents.

6

"It was like this, when my great-grandpa come over here to live, he had 200 head of slaves on the place - ran 43 plough team. Long in the 1860's, the war come on and freed his Niggers. And when they freed his Niggers, they killed his money. Oh, my soul, my great-grandpa had a pile of money in them days. Bet he had a flour barrel full of Confederate money, but that wan't no good after the war was over. You see, he planted no end of cotton in them days. Well, the war near 'bout ruined him, and then he stood security for the old man Fladger, brother of his second wife, and that most finished him. The Fladger man, he left the country, and great-grandpa's land had to go to pay the security. Great-grandpa, he died brokenhearted. The court come in and set out his widow's dower, but it cut her short to 600 acres and it ought've give her 2,000. She was my great-grandma by marriage, 'cause my father was the son of and named for John B. Britton, one of great-grandpa's first children. Well, she deeded then 600 acres to my mother and father to take care of her long as she lived, and at their death, what was left of it come on down to Bud, Henriett, and me. The children of great-grandpa's first two wives that didn't get no share raised such a racket and kept on stirring up so much trouble a-wanting some, pa and ma decided to sell off three tracts and give them a little to hush up their mouths. They sold 93 acres in one tract, 104 acres in another, and still 117 acres in another. Wan't but 300 acres left in the end to come to me, and Bud, and Henriett. In 1909, we three divided the place up, but Bud about

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run it all for us. First one thing and then another come. In 1912, Bud planted 30 acres of cotton and would've made a bale to the acre, but the boll weevil eat it up. In 1920, we had 10 [1/2?] acres of tobacco. But there come a wet spell, and the sun just naturally burned it up - could 7 see it flop in the field. Then a man over yonder had run us that year and when we couldn't meet the payment, he sued us and took part of our land for it. Yes, we've had some trouble, I'll tell you. The old man Jones down there claimed Bud had given him a lien on part of the place, and he sued us for some more of the land and just took it away from us. It wan't a word of it so, but Bud said nobody couldn't do nothing with that man. Wan't no use to say nothing. Don't think me and Bud owns but 10 acres of all them lands today. Yes, we used to have plenty of lands - just lost out - just lost out.

"Honey, I reckon I've got some of the oldest things in all Marion County. Got my great-grandma's old dress that was made every stitch with her fingers, and them stitches couldn't be told from machine ones by nobody. I'll get it toreckly and let you look at it. I know it's the oldest one you've ever seen, 'cause it was made before the time of machines. Wan't no town of Marion when it was bought, wan't no corsets, wan't no whalebones. Why, honey, the people used oak splits for whalebones when that silk gingham dress was made, and my great-grandma wove the cloth to cover them with. Bud and me was thinking the other evening how some folks wouldn't take nothing for that dress, if it belonged to them. But it's just an old keepsake - great-grandma's old dress.

"I'm telling you the blessed truth, my yard looks worse than it's ever looked. The good Lord knows I ain't able to keep it hoed up noways decent. I keeps it clean when I'm able, 'cause like as I have a mind, there ain't nothing prettier than a clean yard and house. This yard used to be mighty pretty when all them old time mulberry trees was out there. That one you see there now, I know it's over a hundred years old. This 8 one here, that's grandma's peach japonica, and she give this evergreen to sister when she wan't nothing more than a knee-high baby. I sho' want to get this yard cleaned up before Thanksgiving, for the good Lord knows I do love grandma's old things.

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"I'm not planning on going nowhere Thanksgiving - just planning on having the day. I don't never know from one day till the next what I'll cook, but if I had a nice piece of fresh pork, it would be mighty nice. Well, it's just about as good as turkey - only it's the name of the meat what counts. Cose I like turkey meat good as anybody, but nothing can't beat them nice fresh meat.

"Bud and me was a-saying here yesterday that there ain't nothing in this world like having a shoat or two to kill for the winter, but Lord knows, we ain't got no place to keep no hogs in. People 'bout here generally turns their hogs out to pick up corn and peas, but we don't darsen to let ours out, being some Niggers stole that last one we had and killed it. Bud said he was go try and see could he pick us up one right reasonable-like and fix a pen for her under the grapevine. Cose people's hogs cost money and we not able to buy no high-priced hog.

"But I was a-saying to Miss Richardson cross yonder this morning, I've got as nice a flock of chickens as anybody's got and I sho' feels thankful for them. Sometimes we eats a egg along and sometimes I sells a few. I got seven right fresh ones today and I've been a-thinking I would like mighty well to get shed of them eggs, being anybody's likely to be a-wanting some. My hens, I hates to part with them 'cause they my pets. Cose I had to sell some of them hens last year so as to buy corn to raise my young chickens on.

9

"There ain't no better piece of land nowhere to live on than this one right here and I sho' thank my stars it come down to me three children. I've got the prettiest garden you ever did see and any time we takes a notion we wants a fish, we goes to the pond and gets it. Me and my sister went down there one morning and caught nine nice flat ones. We wan't down there long neither. I'll tell you what's nice, one of them picnics on the river. I sho' enjoys it. The good Lord knows them fish do taste good that jumps most out the river in the frying pan.

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"Talking of then fish, brings to my mind old Miss Godfrey, poor creature, cross the branch yonder. You know, child, that woman is near 'bout eat up with the cancer. You ought to go and see her, 'cause I tell you, it's awful on this earth what she's been a-suffering. Ain't one Lord's thing that keeps her a-living but a little bit of huckleberry juice and a cup of milk at odd times during the day. It's sho' terrible to stay in that room, I'm telling you. It wan't long I been round that bed till I had to get where the air could blow me. She told Miss Gasque and Miss Martin yesterday there wan't nothing she craved to eat but a fish. My brother, he got word of it and left here for the pond right after dinner. Said he thought he would try and catch that old lady a fish. I told him to bring it on home and I would boil it, pick all the bones out, and fix it nice for her. I knows when a person's in that fix, if they wants a thing, it's a satisfaction to get it even if they can't eat it. Honey, there ain't nothing I likes to do no better than fixing nice things for sick folks. I know one time I had chill and fever and I didn't want nothing to eat. Didn't want ne'er a thing but pickles and biscuit. But Miss Martin, she come over here one day with the nicest plate of dinner 10 and she wouldn't rest till she made me eat it. Seems like it just give me a appetite and started me mending right off. "Child, do tell me where Miss Kathleen is now. Lord knows, I did love that little woman. She used to come down here and help me and Henriett can all day long - ain't been to but one canning meeting since Miss Kathleen left. One woman come here one day and helped all we ladies in the neighborhood can out there under that cedar tree. She brought a cook stove and one of them big pots, and we ladies furnished the stuff to put up and spread dinner out there on the ground. Lord knows, that woman never put up half the stuff Miss Kathleen used to can in a meeting. But, honey, I don't care 'cause I likes to put up my things just like Miss Kathleen learned me. Now, them ladies what's on this government [resettlement?], they've got something, but I've sho' got something, too. I've got 18 quarts of butter beans, 32 quarts of mixed soup, 25 quarts of tomatoes, and all the jelly me and Bud can eat. I didn't make no jelly this year, being the grapes wan't so good, but I had a plenty left over from last year. I wanted some apples, but I didn't have none and wan't able to get nothing that didn't grow on our land. I'm telling you I'm sho' proud of them canned

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things. If we don't eat much, I loves to have them for my own satisfaction. I'm not able to buy and if anybody steps in, I can fix the nicest dinner in no time.

“Yes, me and Bud's getting along pretty good on what we've got. Just like I was a-saying a time back, I think me and Bud does mighty fine not to been to no better school than we has. Pa and ma used to send us to Aerial to school, but we didn't go but three and four months out the year, being schools was short in them days. I don't go out much, but I judging from what I sees up here to the church, I believe education does some people more harm than it does good. Me and Bud goes up there to Aerial Baptist Church and I've decided I would as soon be a Methodist as a Baptist. I know children ain't brought up like they used to be and the sin's going to be on the mother and the father for it. Just don't find no good girls these days and few good boys. Pa was a Methodist and a big-hearted man. When he told me to do a thing, I know I had to do it. Never sassed my old parents in all my life. Just like me and Miss Richardson was a-talking, parents is to blame for the sins of their children. For if you don't bend a child when it's small, it will be like unto a tree, you can't bend it when it gets old. Lord knows, I can't stand no sassy children.

“No, my Savior, we ain't got no house much to live in, but it beats one of somebody elsen. I say, you can go off and have a good time, but it feels mighty good to come back home. No, Lord, there's no place like home.”